



PETAURISTA TAVIANOIDES.

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## PETAURISTA TAGUANOÏDES, *Desm.*

### Great Flying Phalanger.

*Petaurus Taguanoïdes*, Desm. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 400.—Waterh. in Jard. Nat. Lib. Mamm., vol. xi. (Marsupialia) p. 283. pl. 27.

*Petaurista Taguanoïdes*, Desm. Mamm., pt. 1. p. 269.—Gray, List of Mamm. in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 84.

*Petaurista Peronii*, Desm. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 400.

*Petaurus Peronii*, Benn. Cat. of Australian Museum, Sydney, p. 3. no. 10.

*Petaurus Leucogaster*, Mitch. Three Exp. into Eastern Australia, vol. i. p. xvii. ?

*Petaurus (Petaurista) taguanoïdes*, Waterh. Nat. Hist. Mamm., vol. i. p. 322.

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THE Great Flying Phalanger is strictly an inhabitant of the extensive brushes which stretch along the south-eastern and eastern portions of New South Wales, the forests between the mountain ranges and the sea from Port Philip to Moreton Bay being in fact its native habitat. Strictly nocturnal in its movements, this fine animal secretes itself during the day in hollow trees of the largest growth, and on the approach of evening emerges from its retreat in quest of the newly opened blossoms of the *Eucalypti*, in which, together with the tender buds and shoots of the same trees, it finds a description of food congenial to its well-being. It passes along the branches with the utmost celerity, and, when necessitated to remove from one tree to another, effects its object by leaping from the higher branches, and floating through the air in easy and elegant sweeps, its progress being greatly aided by the parachute-like membrane at its sides. Although plentiful in the districts above mentioned, examples are not procured without difficulty, owing to the thickness of the brush or forest; the natives, however, readily detect its retreat by the presence of a few straggling hairs at the entrance of its hole, or by the impressions made by its sharp claws in the bark, and having found it speedily cut it out with their hatchets. It is not a little surprising that this very singular animal should not have been captured alive and sent to this country, like the smaller members of the family; it would be by far the most interesting and attractive: its power of inflicting most severe lacerations with its sharp teeth and strong hooked claws may be one reason why this has not been done.

At present this is the only well-established species of the genus *Petaurista*, but I doubt not that others exist in the extensive forests which stretch along the eastern coast of Australia, and which have as yet been but imperfectly explored. It is subject to very great variety in the colouring of its fur, some specimens being entirely blackish brown on the upper surface, while in others it is blackish brown suffused with grey; others are of a uniform cream colour, and others again quite white: these latter I have always regarded as mere varieties; I am not, however, prepared to say that they had red eyes, like true albinos.

The sexes offer no external difference, except that the female is somewhat smaller than the male.

Fur very long, loose, and soft to the touch, of a brownish black hue on the upper surface and on the flank-membrane, and of a browner tint on the head and back of the neck; the flank-membrane is, moreover, pencilled with white; feet, muzzle and chin nearly black; throat, chest, under side of the body and of the flank-membrane, and the inner side of the limbs pale buffy white; the wrists and ankles are, however, black both on the inner as well as on the outer side; the long hairs near and at the posterior margin of the ear are whitish and project from the edge of the ear like a fringe; tail black or brownish black, almost always paler at the root and along the under surface for a considerable distance from the base, sometimes of a yellowish brown, at others of a brownish white.

The drawing represents the animal rather more than two-thirds of the size of life.